

40,000 old mobile phones collected for recycling in three months

May 08, 2009

Abu Dhabi: About 40,000 mobile phones and 23 tonnes of other electronic waste were collected over the past three months by the Envirofone recycling initiative, organisers have said.

The initiative is a nationwide mobile phone and e-waste collection campaign, sponsored by telecom giant etisalat, in a bid to rid the community of harmful substances.

On February 4, during the UAE National Environment Day etisalat pledged Dh5 million towards the initiative, giving a boost to Envirofone.

In 2008, Envirofone collected 200,000 mobile phones and 52 tonnes of e-waste, across all the emirates. While the number of out-of-use mobile phones collected so far seems high, millions of other gadgets are believed to be kept by some people without using, discarding or recycling them.

"At least three million mobile phones could be out there that need to be collected for recycling, we believe. Some residents have two to three phones that need to be recycled. One person even had 22 mobile phones that were not being used," Stuart Fleming, managing director of Enviroserve, which oversees the initiative, told *Gulf News*.

"Clearly, this year we are going ahead of last year's efforts with increased awareness of the need to be socially responsible."

The harmful toxins found in mobile phones and other electronic equipment could cause damage to the environment and pollute water bodies to a large extent if they are discarded without thought, Fleming said, while calling on residents to make use of the mobile deposit boxes set up as part of the initiative. "It is vital that these electronic materials are disposed off well."

As an incentive, etisalat is offering rewards on a monthly basis. Besides this, a part of the money goes to charity. 450 mobile deposit boxes have been installed at key places to facilitate the process.

"Accessibility is key in making recycling an easy option. For this, deposit boxes have been placed at Adnoc and Enoc petrol stations, etisalat business centres, Emirates Post offices and a few selected banks," he said.

The mobile phones collected will be taken to Enviroserve's recycling facility at Dubai Investment Park where the materials will be separated. One of the e-waste recycling bottlenecks is the worry over data stored in these devices, he said.

"The data on mobiles or computers are simply discarded. We are not traders. We merely facilitate recycling so people do not have to worry," he assured.

Those who drop off mobile phones are asked to secure it in an envelop with the contact number of the person, so that the names go into a monthly draw.

(Gulf News)